

Information Relative Caregivers Need to Know

What does it mean to be in the custody of DFCS (Foster Care)?

A report is made to the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) about the safety of a child. A preliminary investigation conducted by a child protective services (CPS) case manager and possibly a police officer finds that the child's safety and well-being may be at risk. If a child is unsafe in his or her own home, the juvenile court judge issues an order placing the child in the temporary custody of the state, and the local DFCS. The local county DFCS is then responsible for ensuring the safety, well-being, and permanency of the child through locating the best placement and developing a case plan with the parent for the child's safe return home. Only the juvenile court has the authority to place a child in protective custody and only the juvenile court can grant approval for a child's return to the parent or guardian.

If a child is in care, what can the family do to help?

First, you can continue to provide love and support to both the parent and child. This is a very difficult time for everyone and the child and parent need your help now, more than ever. It is important that the child maintain regular contact with family. The parent may also need help in accomplishing the case plan activities that must be met before the child can return home. You will be asked to participate and attend the Family Team Meeting (FTM). The FTM (where family members come together to discuss the critical issues and circumstances, which led to the child's placement and the steps or actions, required to have the child reunited with the family are discussed) is held within nine (9) days of a child's placement in foster care. You will also receive information about the Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment (CCFA). The CCFA is completed on all children in foster care and includes, a Health Check Screen (completed within nine days of the child's placement in foster care), an educational assessment, family assessment, and psychological assessment. The outcomes of the assessment help to guide staff in making decision about the best placement for the child, the critical service needs of the child and family, and the most viable plan for achieving permanency. You may be contacted by an approved CCFA provider conducting the assessment to provide information about the family.

Will DFCS allow us to keep the child in our home?

Placement with a relative caregiver is always explored and assessed when a child enters foster care. If at all possible and if appropriate, an adult relative caretaker will be considered over a non-relative caregiver. The relative caretaker, however, must be able to ensure the safety and well-being of the child, as well as, satisfactorily meet certain State requirements.

What do we have to do to provide a home for the child?

Notify the case manager immediately. If it is an emergency and the child is placed in the care of the agency, the case manager may contact you. The case manager will discuss the relative care assessment/home evaluation process with you. An initial home visit may be scheduled which would allow the agency to place a child with relatives, sometimes within 24-48 hours. Before placement is made with a relative, DFCS must visit the home, provide information about foster care, relative caregiver requirements, and gather information about the household (i.e. background checks, ability to meet the child's needs, financial support needed needs of the child, etc.).

What type of assistance is available?

All children placed in foster care are assigned a case manager. This individual works with you, the parents, and the child in providing referrals for services to ensure the safety and well-being of the child. In addition, the child is entitled to an initial clothing allowance. Additional support and services may be available to you to assist with meeting any needs the child may have during the placement with you. The case manager is required to explain the options available for financial support. The options include approval as a relative foster home, applying for Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and child care.

What happens next?

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If your home is approved, the child will be placed with you as soon as possible. After placement, there will be ongoing case reviews with the parent and reviews by the juvenile court judge and/or a court appointed citizens review panel (panel reviews). You will be invited to participate in permanency planning as foster care is a temporary plan for the child.

Whom do I call if we have problems?

You may always call the case manger. The case manager's name is _____ and phone # is: _____ . If you are unable to reach the case manager, you may contact the social services supervisor, _____ at _____.

If you have an emergency or need to talk with someone from DFCS after-hours or on holidays/weekends, you may call the 24 Hour emergency number _____.

(Adapted from the DHR publication, "A Guide for Parents of Children Placed in Foster Care" and "facts every teen should know about the foster care system in Georgia")